

Conference report:

The thirtieth annual conference of MELCom International was convened by Mastan Ebtehaj, Librarian of the Middle East Centre, St Antony's College, Oxford.

The conference was attended by 67 registered persons and a few more colleagues who came from Oxford. Seven of the participants were commercial. The registered attendees were from 14 different countries, namely, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, France, Germany, Israel, Lebanon, Morocco, The Netherlands, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom, Egypt and the United States.

In the opening address, special attention was paid to our jubilee year and the history of Middle East librarianship in thirty eventful years. Among founding active members, we had the pleasure of having with us Derek Hopwood, Paul Auchterlonie, and Françoise Barrès-Kotobi.

There were two books and journals displays in front of the conference hall, offering discount on items bought on the spot.

The scientific programme comprised nineteen presentations, two of which were in French. They covered almost all library fields (see programme), from special manuscript and print book collections to catalogues, user services, library history, with a whole session devoted to the digital environment, both projects and products which seemed to interest everyone in particular.

There were three visits on Tuesday afternoon: the Bodleian Library, hosted by Head of Oriental Collections Lesley Forbes, to the Centre for Islamic Studies, hosted by Dr Hassan Abed & Dr Afifi al-Akiti, and St John's Library, hosted by Professor Geert Jan van Gelder. Both the Bodleian and St John's held an exhibition (or a display) of oriental manuscripts.

The conference ended as usual with a business meeting on Wednesday afternoon with the President Arnoud Vrolijk's concluding remarks and the Secretary Sara Yontan Musnik's brief commentaries, which included a call to all the speakers to submit their papers preferably in PDF format by mid July to be posted on the website of the association.

The Treasurer Mastan Ebtehaj's financial report will be available soon. However in the meantime, it is worth noting that as a convener she managed to raise funds which helped to subsidise accommodation at St Anne's (£ 40 instead of £ 67), the Bodleian visit (by £1 per person) dinner (£2 per person for the meal and more for the extra drinks) and the taxis to the restaurant.

MELCom International also offered two grants this year to two of the speakers. The policy of grants will be summarised and posted on the website.

Mastan Ebtehaj, also acting as webmaster, has appealed to the audience for any remarks that may help to improve the work done with the website. She also called for our "artistic contributions" that is for suggesting the design of a logo

for MELCom International. It is recommended that this logo be as abstract as possible, so as to cover all the cultures (languages, religions) of the Middle East.

Forth Coming conferences

The 31st conference will be convened by Nuria Garaeva in Kazan and the tentative date is June 2008. However, this should be confirmed by October. Nuria Garaeva will provide as much information as possible regarding how to arrive to Kazan and where to stay as early bookings may be essential.

Nuria Torres on behalf of Casa Arabe invites MELCom International to Cordoba for the 32nd conference. This invitation was gladly accepted by the vote of the present members. Nuria Torres suggests May as a suitable month.

Elections

The current president Arnoud Vrolijk wished to stand down after seven years of office. The newly elected president is Helga Rebhan, Head of the Oriental and East Asian Department, Bavarian State Library in Munich (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek). We wish her success and pleasure at her new position.

Sara Yontan Musnik and Mastan Ebtehaj were elected for a second term respectively as secretary and treasurer.

Announcements

Paul Auchterlonie announces that Ahmed Abu-Zayed will be joining him as administrator of Lis-Middle-East and will progressively replace him.

Sara Yontan asks permission (and is granted) to encourage MELCom International exchange of information and announcements via Lis Middle East by advertising it on the MI website.

Paul Auchterlonie also suggests that archives of MELCom International be established where previous and current documents would be permanently deposited. Indeed, for the 30th anniversary, it was rather difficult to find old circulars, scientific programmes, lists of participants and even pictures.

Mastan Ebtehaj who is preparing a "Gallery of Pictures" for the website and has already collected and scanned some seems to be lacking photographs for a number of years and appeals to the old comers to have a look at their personal archives for contributions to the Gallery.

The conference ended with special thanks to Mastan Ebtehaj who did a wonderful job as the local convener and to Arnoud Vrolijk who led MELCom International through seven stimulating years. We hope they were as rewarding to him too and wish him all the best.